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ABSTRACT

A study of the relationship between involvement in an extracurricular drama club and the self-esteem of at-risk preadolescent and elementary students examined 244 fourth and fifth grade students in a rural Missouri school district. The experimental group consisted of 72 students who selected drama club from a list of extracurricular activities. The control group consisted of the remaining 172 students who were not involved in the drama club but who chose a different extracurricular activity. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered to students before and after their participation in the drama club. All fourth and fifth grade teachers completed an At-Risk Identification Scale for their students. The Drop-Out Alert Scale was administered to assess the attitudes of the treatment group before and after participation in the drama club. Results showed that participation in the drama club had a positive influence on students' self-esteem and reduced their at-risk behaviors. (MM)

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The Relationship between Participation in an Extra-Curricular Drama Club and the Self-Esteem of At-Risk Elementary Students

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The Relationship between Participation in an Extra-Curricular Drama Club and the Self-Esteem of At-Risk Elementary Students

ABSTRACT

For the purpose of improving self-esteem and reducing at-risk behaviors, a drama club was offered as an extra-curricular option to fourth and fifth grade students. Through funds provided by a state-supported grant, the "Team Players Drama Club" was a year long after-school program which met weekly and gave public performances several times a year. According to the research, such opportunities for student participation tends to influence personality development and socialization. The research also suggests that these activities tend to influence the self-esteem of elementary students. The researchers used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to address three directional hypotheses: (1) Participation would reduce the at-risk behaviors of its members as measured by the *At-Risk Identification Scale*; (2) Participation would have a positive effect on club members' perceptions of those personal and environmental characteristics related to at-risk behaviors as measured by the *Drop-Out Alert Scale*; and (3) Participation would produce a positive change in the self-esteem as measured by the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale*. A comparison of scores of 72 drama club participants and 172 non-participants indicated that the drama club had a positive influence on their self-esteem and reduced their at-risk behaviors. The data were statistically treated with an ANOVA and *t*-tests for Dependent Measures with an established alpha level of .05. Recommendations indicated the need for down-sizing the group due to management and discipline problems.

The Relationship between Participation in an Extra-Curricular Drama Club and the Self-Esteem of At-Risk Elementary Students

Self-esteem, the evaluation one makes of oneself, is a dimension of self-concept which positively or negatively affects personal growth, social interactions, and the academic success of students (Groves & Hinds, 1989). Because a deficit in any one of these attributes usually identifies the at-risk child, early intervention strategies for elementary children identified as at-risk often include efforts to raise their self-esteem.

By offering extra-curricular activities, schools provide opportunities for student participation in ventures that influence personality development and socialization (Simeroth, 1987). Several studies have investigated the relationship between extra-curricular participation and self-esteem. Murtaugh (1988) suggests that participation in peer-valued activities is associated with greater peer approval which leads to higher self-esteem. Gage (1990) and Skinner (1989) associate elevated self-esteem with the feelings of pride and sense of identification with one's school which students gain by participation in extra-curricular activities. Moreover, a compelling argument for offering after-school extra-curricular activities is that students who belong to these types of social support groups are less likely to engage in anti-social behaviors which typify the at-risk child (Andre & Holland, 1987).

Research also supports the notion that participation in dramatic activities enhances the development of self-esteem (Regan, 1983), and is an "...effective way of teaching understanding, morals, and aesthetics" (Bedard & Schwartz, 1984, p.4). Children involved in role-playing gain confidence in their

abilities, feel a sense of camaraderie, and improve their verbal communication skills. As a result, social skills are improved by the group dynamics inherent in dramatic projects (Chambers, 1970). According to Chambers (1970) and Wright (1984), the use of dramatic activities in the content areas facilitates student interaction and encourages learning. Psychologist and educational consultant Douglas Heath believes one of the keys to academic success and to the development of healthy self-esteem is this sort of involvement (as cited in Brandt, 1990).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if involvement in an extra-curricular drama club related to the self-esteem of at-risk preadolescent and elementary students.

Hypotheses

1. Participation in an extra-curricular drama club will reduce the at-risk behaviors of its members as measured by the *At- Risk Indentification Scale*.

2. Participation in an extra-curricular drama club will have a positive effect on members' perceptions of those personal and environmental characteristics related to at-risk behaviors as measured by the *Drop-Out Alert Scale*.

3. Participation in an extra-curricular drama club will produce a positive change in the self-esteem of its members as measured by the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale*.

Subjects

The subjects were 244 fourth and fifth grade students in a rural Missouri

school district. The experimental group consisted of 72 students who selected drama club from a list of extra-curricular activities. The control group was the 172 fourth and fifth grade students who were not involved in the drama club but had chosen a different activity such as science club, math club, etc.

Design

In order to address Hypothesis One, this quasi-experimental study followed the pretest-posttest control group design. Each fourth and fifth grade teacher completed an *At-Risk Identification Scale* on every student in her class in October and again in May.

To address Hypothesis Two, the one-group pretest-posttest design was employed. The *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale* was administered before and after participation in the drama club. The same design was employed to address Hypothesis Three. The *Drop-Out Alert Scale* was administered to assess the attitudes of the treatment group before and after participation in the drama club. Due to classroom scheduling, the control group was not administered the *Piers-Harris Self-concept Scale* or the *Drop-Out Alert Scale*.

To interpret the scores, a *t*-test for Dependent Measures was used to identify any significant changes in pretest and posttest scores. In addition, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to capture any significant differences between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group. An alpha level of .05 was used in accepting or rejecting the three hypotheses.

Instruments

Data for the study were generated using pretest and posttest scores from

three instruments: (A) The researcher-developed *At-Risk Identification Scale* was completed by fourth and fifth grade teachers on each student in their class. This 22 item four-point Likert-type scale identifies frequencies of at-risk behaviors. (B) The researcher-developed 10 item *Drop-Out Alert Scale* is a self-report, four-point Likert type scale designed to identify personal and environmental characteristics of children at-risk by asking questions such as: (1) Last year how many times were you sent to the principal for misbehaving? (2) Is it important to you that you graduate from high school? (3) About how many days did you miss school last year? Both tests were adapted and revised from several informal teacher-developed instruments collected at various At-Risk workshops. (C) The *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale* (Piers & Harris, 1984) "is an 80 item self-report questionnaire designed to assess how children and adolescents feel about themselves" (p. 1). The scale has been used with various groups, and reliability coefficients ranging from .88 to .93 have been found (Lefley, 1974; Franklin, Duley, Rousseau & Sabers, 1981).

Limitations

Pre-existing differences between students who chose to and those who chose not to participate in drama club may have affected the conclusions reached from the *At-Risk Identification Scale*. During analysis of the test scores, some teacher bias was evident. Males were perceived to exhibit more at-risk behaviors than females on both pretests and posttests. (However this discrepancy was not evident in students' self-reported scores). There appeared to be an inconsistency in teacher scoring. While some teacher scores indicated much thought and deliberation in responses (varied responses, specific personal

comments, etc.); other teachers provided repetitive responses (pattern sets of all one number) to most of their students. The same pattern was apparent for club members; some chose answers quite carefully while others marked them all the same.

The validity and reliability of the *At-Risk Identification Scale* and the *Drop-Out Alert Scale* have not been established. In addition, students' honesty and consideration of the questions may have been affected by their age and/or experience.

Maturation was inevitable and controlled to some degree with the non-participant group. The novelty of being in an extra-curricular club which gained public recognition may also have skewed test results. Increases in self-esteem created by 'belonging' to the drama club may fade when the students are no longer members. At-risk behaviors which were reduced by club participation may eventually reappear.

Multiple treatment may have affected test results. The Knob Noster school district has a strong counseling program which emphasizes positive attitudes and behaviors. The increases in self-esteem and reduction of at-risk behaviors which are indicated by posttest scores, may have been been influenced by activities other than the drama club.

Procedure

The Team Players Drama Club was a year long after-school program which met weekly and gave public performances several times a year. The purpose of the club was to offer elementary students an opportunity to improve their social skills, provide an outlet for their creative talents, and increase their self-

esteem, thereby lessening at-risk behaviors.

All members of the group were given a uniform consisting of a vest and a badge which was worn to school on the day of club meetings. This uniform was intended to help unify the group and create both cohesiveness within the club and a sense of belonging within each child.

The **Team Players Drama Club** began each weekly meeting by reciting the following creed:

I believe in myself
and in my ability
to add to the world's beauty
and to the world's joy.
As a Team Player
I will try
to be a credit to my school
to those who love me
and to myself. (McCollester, 1990)

The creed was designed by the researcher to strengthen self-esteem and to diminish self-doubt, to connect members with humankind, and to remind them of their responsibility to their families, their society and to themselves. The following by-laws were developed which urged the members to work cooperatively with one another and to keep their grades up.

(1) Members must keep their academic grades above the level of F in order to participate in public performances.

(2) Drama club membership depends on cooperative participation in both practice and performance. Members will be suspended from the drama club for non-cooperative behavior.

Membership varied from 60 to 100 students during the year. With the aid of volunteer teachers, the director chose or created activities which included as many students as possible in order to give all members an opportunity to

perform.

Members participated in faculty-guided structured projects which included: (a) researching their ethnic heritage and identifying the flags of their ancestors' native countries, (b) learning and performing the dances and songs of various countries represented by the drama club members, (c) choral reading of native poetry, (d) reader's theatre presentations of folktales and fables. Included in these dramatic activities were: (1) geography lessons in which members were encouraged to discover the homeland/countries of their ancestors; (2) cultural lessons in which members learned about the society and literature of those homelands/countries; and (3) music lessons, as they attempted to recreate some of the dancing styles of their ancestral lands. In December, members of the drama club performed a "rap" revision of "The Night Before Christmas" for the Parent Teacher Organization. They ended the year with traditional acting in an anti-drug, alcohol, and tobacco program which was presented to the entire elementary school.

Findings of the Study

The first hypothesis of the study addressed the effect of the after-school drama club on the at-risk behaviors of its participants. A *t*-test of Dependent Measures was used to compare the mean scores generated by the *At-Risk Identification Scale* of the experimental group (members) and the control (non-members). This information is presented below in table 1.

Table 1

A Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores on the At-Risk Identification Scale of Drama Club Participants and Non-Participants

		Pretest		Posttest				
Group	n	M	SD	M	SD	Diff	t-value	p*
Member	72	31.5	6.4	33.3	6.4	1.81	2.60	.010*
Non-Member	172	31.2	6.2	30.5	7.3	-.76	-2.02	.041*

*$p < .05$

Note: p - two-tailed probability

Examination of the data reveals a statistically significant change in the drama club members' scores. The non-members' scores decreased during the period of the study. It should be noted that the pretest scores of both groups indicated homogeneity of the samples.

To capture the differences between the posttest scores of the participants and the non-participants, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed. This information is presented below in Table 2.

Table 2

A Comparison of Posttest Mean Scores on the At-Risk Identification Scale Between Drama Club Members and Non-Members

Scale	Group					
	Members (n=72)		Nonmembers (n=172)			
	M	SD	M	SD	F-Ratio	Sig.*
At-Risk Scale	33.3	6.34	30.5	7.33	8.22	.0048*

*p < .05

The second hypothesis addressed the effect of the drama club on the students' attitudes and behaviors as indicated by their self-reported scores on the *Drop-Out Alert Scale*. A t-test of Dependent Measures was used to compare the scores generated by this scale. Due to scheduling conflicts, the control group was not assessed on this scale. This information is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

A Comparison Between the Pretest and Posttest Scores on the Drop-Out Alert Scale of Drama Club Participants

		Pretest		Posttest				
Group	n	M	SD	M	SD	Diff	t-value	p*
Member	72	73.1	6.3	76.6	5.3	3.49	7.07	.0002*

*p < .05

Examination of the data reveals a statistically significant change (positive) in

the drama club members' scores. There appears to be a causal relationship between participation in the drama club and a positive change in members' perceptions of those personal and environmental characteristics related to at-risk behaviors.

The third hypothesis addressed the students' change in self-esteem as indicated by their self-reported scores on the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale*. A t-test for Dependent Measures was used to capture any significant differences in pretest and posttest scores. Due to scheduling conflicts, the control group was not assessed on this scale. This information is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

A Comparison Between the Drama Club Participants' Pretest and Posttest Scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale

		Pretest		Posttest				
Group	n	M	SD	M	SD	Diff	t-value	p*
Member	72	55.8	14.4	62.5	12.4	6.74	7.15	.0002*

*p < .05

Examination of the data reveals a statistically significant change (positive) in the drama club members' scores. There appeared to be an association between participation in the drama club and students' self-concept as indicated by this self-reported scale.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the Team Players Drama Club appears to be an effective method of helping children develop greater self-esteem. The Drama Club also appears to influence at-risk behaviors; during the period of the study participants in the drama club exhibited fewer at-risk behaviors. The success of this program is consistent with research on self-esteem (Wehlage, 1983; Dryfoos, 1990; Silvernail, 1985), at-risk behaviors (Cohen, 1990), drama and extra-curricular activities (Klein,1989; Ohanian,1988).

The results of this study support all three hypotheses on which the program was based. Classroom teachers reported a reduction of at-risk behaviors in the drama club members, and members expressed fewer at-risk attitudes and greater self-esteem.

In addition to the formally scored tests, questionnaires were completed by club members and teachers to determine their personal reactions to the club. Responses from members included the following positive comments:

"I made new friends from the other classes."

"I learned stuff about history."

"I didn't know drugs could do that to my body."

"I liked the danc. = and the rap."

"I'm not so scared to talk out loud now."

The two negative responses which several children expressed were that there were "Too many kids", and "The bad kids made me mad 'cause we had to stop and wait".

These problems did exist, and they are related. The club was such a success

that it had too many participants. Although there were pretests and posttests on only 72 members, at times the membership exceeded 100 students. Drama Club leaders frequently divided students into smaller groups and practiced in separate rooms. Even so, too much time was spent on group management and discipline.

Teacher comments were favorable. Several commented on the development of greater confidence or "blossoming" of some previously shy children. Some appreciated the academic and cultural connection to an extra-curricular activity. Others simply said, "You're doing a fantastic job!" However, some classroom teachers felt there were too many members, but no solution was identified .

Summary

One of the significant effects of participation in extra-curricular activities is the enhancement of self-esteem. In many instances, researchers have found that children who participated in dramatic activities developed greater self-confidence as a result of their participation. Silvernail (1985) explains that self-esteem "...is influenced by personal performance, abilities, appearance, and judgments of significant others and is strongly influenced by the identifications we make with particular social groups" (p. 9).

This after-school drama club provided members with a positive social group and a comfortable place to perform. This experience offered these elementary students an opportunity to earn the positive judgments of peers, teachers, and parents, all considered to be significant others in the lives of children. As they gained in self-esteem, their need to engage in at-risk behaviors decreased.

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